



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## FITZGERALD'S LETTERS TO FANNY KEMBLE.<sup>1</sup>

It is late in the day to be praising Edward FitzGerald, either as a man or as a writer, but the appearance of this volume containing one hundred and fourteen of his letters to the celebrated Mrs. Kemble, calls for more than a perfunctory notice. It is true that nine of them have appeared in whole or in part in Mr. Wright's three volume edition of the "Letters and Literary Remains of Edward FitzGerald" (1889), and that eighty-five had been published in *The Temple Bar Magazine*, so that little of the volume can be said to be, strictly speaking, fresh material for judging or rather enjoying—for who would judge?—the translator of Omar Khayyám. Still, these letters cover so well the last twelve years of FitzGerald's life, and are so uniform in scope and spirit, that one cannot help feeling a personal gratitude to the editor who has now gathered them into a compact and handy volume. Mr. Aldis Wright has won a deserved fame as a scholarly editor of Shakspeare, but we may be sure that he duly appreciates the gratitude that many readers must have shown him as the editor and friend of Edward FitzGerald.

In his preface to the "Letters and Literary Remains," Mr. Wright stated that in his judgment it would be wise not to attempt any detailed sketch of so uneventful a life as that of FitzGerald and that therefore he would simply print a volume of selected letters, and let those who cared to do so learn to know and love the man through them. The result has justified the editor's conclusions, and he has since had occasion to give us the letters, apart from the works, in two volumes uniform with that under review. In view of this fact we shall perhaps be justified in referring

---

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Edward FitzGerald to Fanny Kemble, 1871-1883*; edited by William Aldis Wright. New York and London: Macmillan & Co., 1895; 12mo. pp. viii., 261.

our readers to the letters themselves for any details that they may wish to gather about a man whom every lover of good literature and good men should learn to know, beyond the bare facts that his life extended from 1809 to 1883, and was passed mainly in leisured retirement, shared with books and the sea, that he was known and loved by some of the most noted men of his time, among them the Tennyson brothers, Carlyle, Thackeray, Spedding, and our two Americans, Lowell and C. E. Norton, and that he won a distinguished name himself as the translator or rather interpreter of *Æschylus*, Calderon, and Omar Khayyâm. In this last capacity it can hardly be denied that FitzGerald made himself a name that will live, but to make a name that will live is not nearly so great an achievement as to make one's self live, and this FitzGerald has unintentionally done through his letters. Himself the most retiring of mortals except to his intimate friends, he is now known to us far better than most of his great contemporaries. Known to us down to his smallest whims and prejudices, but known to us in a way that not even he would have shrunk from — known to be loved as one learns to love one's dearest friends. If any reader is proof against "Old Fitz," as Thackeray called him, let him be anathema. Not to know FitzGerald is pardonable, but to know him and not love him is — well, if there be anything worse than to be fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils, it is *that*.

The proof of this last proposition cannot of course be given in a review, cannot indeed be given at all, nor can one establish more successfully FitzGerald's claim to be considered one of the most scholarly and subtle critics that our century has produced. But he is this just as surely as he is "dear old Fitz," and it is no unneeded proof of the humane side of Alfred Tennyson's character that he bore cheerful testimony to the fact. If an admirer had in his life-time culled a body of critical dicta from FitzGerald's correspondence and expected to win the commendation of the eccentric genius, he would have been woefully disap-

pointed, but if one were to make such a collection now, not a few people would return him hearty thanks. We make this statement in full view of the fact that FitzGerald thought that Tennyson's poetry fell off after 1842, that he did not rave over Mrs. Browning or George Eliot, that he had the audacity to continue to love Scott and Dickens after they had been pronounced old-fashioned, and that he actually found Goethe's *Faust* lacking in imagination and invention. Notwithstanding, or perhaps in consequence of, all this we should not mind being called upon to defend the thesis that, with the exception of Matthew Arnold, FitzGerald had as keen a critical insight as any Englishman of his generation. He himself would have said this of Spedding, leaving out the qualification, but Tennyson, as we have seen, said it of him — and Tennyson was right, as right as when in the dedication to "Tiresias" he wrote of FitzGerald's "golden Eastern lay : "

Than which I know no version done  
In English more divinely well ;  
A planet equal to the sun  
Which cast it, that large infidel,  
Your Omar.

If the claim that is here made with regard to FitzGerald's critical genius be true, it is true because of the very same qualities of the man that made him dear to all his friends, and have won him hosts of admirers among those who know him only through his letters. FitzGerald is a great critic because of his humane qualities — his love for all that is true and beautiful in man or nature or books ; his gentleness, his utter unselfishness — in a word, his sympathy with his fellows ; with their failures and successes. If, therefore, the reader of FitzGerald comes across some curious or bizarre expression of opinion about a man or a book, he should be careful not to pass it over with a shrug of the shoulders as the expression of the personal prejudice of an eccentric old man. FitzGerald's dictum may not be entirely true, but it will be found to be based in all proba-

bility on a subtle perception of a lack of proportion, or harmony in the man or book criticised. For such perception a critic must have wide and easy flowing sympathies, and these FitzGerald possessed in ampler measure than any modern Englishman that we are acquainted with. In creative or structural criticism he did little or nothing, and had he attempted it, he would have failed to reach the level of excellence attained by many men whose mental and spiritual qualifications were far below his. But he knew his own powers too well to make any such attempt, indeed he never set up as a critic at all, but simply went on scattering the pearls of his wisdom before men and women, some of whom were thoughtful enough to gather and preserve them. But a few extracts from the letters before us will attract more readers to the Sage of Woodbridge [*pace* his modest ghost] than anything we can possibly write about him.

Here is a characteristic paragraph with nothing critical about it: "Now I am going for a Sail on the famous River Deben, to pass by the same fields of green Wheat, Barley, Rye, and Beet-root, and come back to the same Dinner. Positively the only new thing we have in Woodbridge is a Waxen Bust (Lady, of course,) at the little Hairdresser's opposite. She turns slowly round, to our wonder and delight; I caught the little Barber the other day in the very act of winding her up to run her daily Stage of Duty. Well, she has not got to answer Letters, as poor Mrs. Kemble must do to hers always sincerely.—E. F. G." [From the letter of July 4, 1871; p. 3.]

If the adherence to the good old fashion of capitalizing all the nouns one wishes to, seem at first glance to argue affectation on the part of the writer, one has but to observe the structure of the above sentences and to study their diction in order to perceive that no man has ever written racier or less affected English than the author of these letters. What can be more informal for example than the following, and how unexpectedly the humorous turn is brought in! "Chorley [H. F. Chorley, the eminent musical critic], too,

though an irritable, nervous creature, as his outside expressed, was kind and affectionate to Family and Friend, I always heard. But I think the Angels must take care to keep in tune when he gets among them." [Letter of February 27, 1872; p. 9.]

Equally good is this paragraph about Frederick Tennyson: "I have been having Frederick Tennyson with me down here. He has come to England (from Jersey where his home now is) partly on Business, and partly to bring over a deaf old Gentleman who has discovered the Original Mystery of Free-masonry, by means of Spiritualism. The Free-masons have for Ages been ignorant, it seems, of the very Secret which all their Emblems and Signs refer to; and the question is, if they care enough for their own Mystery to buy it of this ancient Gentleman. If they do not, he will shame them by Publishing it to all the world. Frederick Tennyson, who has long been a Swedenborgian, a Spiritualist, and is now even himself a Medium, is quite grand and sincere in this as in all else; with the Faith of a Gigantic Child—pathetic and yet humorous to consider and consort with." [Letter of June 6, 1872; p. 14.]

The subject of the following eulogy could hardly have made the "ancient gentleman" stand out more clearly than FitzGerald has done: "I have been sunning myself in Dickens—even in his later and very inferior 'Mutual Friend' and 'Great Expectations'—very inferior to his best, but with things better than anyone else's best, caricature as they may be. I really must go and worship at Gads-hill, as I have worshipped at Abbotsford, though with less Reverence, to be sure. But I must look on Dickens as a mighty Benefactor to Mankind." [Letter of August 24, 1874, p. 48].

From Dickens to Alfred Tennyson is for many people a long stride, but we need not fear to make FitzGerald take it: "When Tennyson was telling me of how the Quarterly abused him (humorously, too,) and desirous of knowing why one did not care for his later works, etc., I thought that

if he had lived an active Life, as Scott and Shakespeare ; or even ridden, shot, drunk, and played the Devil, as Byron, he would have done much more, and talked about it much less. ‘You know’, said Scott to Lockhart, ‘that I don’t care a curse about what I write’, and one sees that he did not. I don’t believe it was far otherwise with Shakespeare. Even old Wordsworth, wrapped up in his Mountain mists, and proud as he was, was above all this vain Disquietude ; proud, not vain, was he ; and that a Great Man (as Dante) has some right to be—but not to care what the Coteries say. What a Rigmarole !” [Letter of October 24, 1876, p. 112].

Here is something that our American critics might put in their pipes and smoke before they try again to make people who have been brought up on Dryden believe that Mr. Lowell, with all his admirable qualities, could write an ode. FitzGerald has been praising heartily the volume of essays entitled “Among my Books”, and he goes on to say : “Mr. Lowell’s Ode [For the Fourth of July, 1876] . . . seemed to me full of fine Thought ; but it wanted Wings. I mean it kept too much to one Level, though a high Level, for Lyric Poetry, as Ode is supposed to be, both in respect to Thought and Metre. Even Wordsworth (least musical of men) changed his Flight to better purpose in his Ode to Immortality. Perhaps, however, Mr. Lowell’s subject did not require, or admit, such Alternations.” [Letter of December 12, 1876, pp. 115–116]. So again : “Mr. Lowell sent me his Three Odes about Liberty, Washington, etc. They seemed to me full of fine Thought and in a lofty Strain, but wanting Variety both of Mood and Diction for Odes, which are supposed to mean things to be chaunted. So I ventured to hint to him—Is he an angry man? But he wouldn’t care, knowing of me only through amiable Mr. Norton, who knows me through you. I think *he* must be a very amiable, modest man.” [Letter of February 19, 1877, pp. 118–119].

But we have poached long enough on Mr. Wright’s preserves. If the reader wishes to learn more of Edward Fitz-

Gerald and his dear friends Scott, Cervantes, Mme. de Sévigné, and above all George Crabbe, or of his reader that eat like a pig and read like a prodigy, of his flowers and his lugger, of his recipe for taking a photograph — in short, of the lovable man himself, he will at once invest in this volume and its two companions, even if he does not try to pick up the three handsome octavos of 1889; and he will join with us in hoping that Mr. Wright will find that he has still enough materials for another volume of this delightful correspondence. The present writer would be thankful even for a volume of FitzGerald scraps, for though coming from a rich table there would be no Dives flavor about them.

X.